



SAFETY ALERT 02-02

17th Coast Guard District
United States Coast Guard
P. O. Box 25517
Juneau, Alaska 99802
907-463-2810 or 800-478-7369 In Alaska
www.uscg.mil/d17/m/CFVS.shtml

CALL FOR A FREE DOCKSIDE EXAM

MSO Anchorage	271-6700	MSD Sitka	966-5454
MSO Valdez	835-7223	MSD Ketchikan	225-4496
MSO Juneau	463-2450	MSD Kodiak	486-5918
MSD Dutch Harbor	581-3466	MSD Kenai	283-3292

LONE FISHERMAN TRAGICALLY LOST OVERBOARD **NEAR ELFIN COVE**

Background: The Seventeenth Coast Guard District Safety Alert program provides “Lessons Learned” from marine casualties in support of the Coast Guard’s “Ready for Sea” safety program.

Incident: The owner was the only person on board the fishing vessel when it arrived in Elfin Cove that night. He was an experienced fisherman having fished for many years in Southeast Alaska. He planned to finish up last minute details and head out the next morning to troll for king salmon. When he departed Elfin Cove, he was wearing a sweat suit but no personal flotation device. When he departed Elfin Cove, seas were calm, at just three feet. The temperature was in the low 20’s and there were occasional snow showers. When last seen he was putting out his port stabilizer. Just 20 minutes later his fishing vessel was discovered on the beach north of Elfin Cove harbor. The engine was in gear with the autopilot engaged, pushing the vessel up onto the beach. Both the port and starboard stabilizers had been set but no fishing gear was in the water. It was an hour and a half before the Coast Guard was able to locate the owner in the water. Although CPR was performed during the flight into Sitka, he was pronounced dead at the hospital.

Lessons Learned: Although the cause of the casualty remains unknown there are “Ready for Sea” safety factors that are relevant to this incident and several “lessons learned”.

1. Wear a personal flotation device (PFD) when on deck. Fishing is risky business but the risk is even greater when fishing alone and there’s no one there to help if you fall in the water. If you fall overboard, a flotation device can keep you afloat until help arrives. The best device, a Type I PFD, will turn the wearer face up when in the water. The operator had a welt on his head and was probably unconscious when he went into the water. Had he worn a Type I PFD, he would have improved his chance for surviving.
2. Consider installing an engine kill switch and connecting to it when working on deck. When fishing alone and there are no other vessels nearby, it is important to remain as close to the vessel as possible. A dead in the water vessel will quickly attract attention. Combine that with wearing a PFD and that will improve your chances of surviving a fall overboard.
3. Attach a personal locator beacon to your PFD. If you fall overboard it will improve your chances for a quicker rescue.
4. Apply non-skid to the deck of the vessel, especially in areas where you work fishing gear. Fishing vessel decks are slippery and with the cooler temperatures in Alaska they can be extremely dangerous.
5. The vessel did not have a current CG dockside exam. These free exams, performed at the dock, help identify safety deficiencies that can lead to loss of vessels and/or crew.